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Rogers, Fulbright in Conflict Over Laos, MIRV Issues

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Behind the suavity of the big city corporation lawyer and the courtliness of the Southern gentleman, the conflict was steely clear.

William P. Rogers, the smiling lawyer turned secretary of state, had no intention of yielding an inch on Nixon administration plans for handling the problems of Laos and multiple nuclear warhead tests.

The soft-spoken Southerner who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arkansas Democrat J. William Fulbright, felt some changes were in order, especially in U.S. military involvement in Laos.

Maybe a dictatorship can fight a war without telling its people, but it is an extraordinary development for a democracy to do so, Fulbright said. He said it quietly, like a saddened professor.

Talk With Reporters

The secretary and the senator spoke separately with reporters after Rogers had appeared for more than three hours yesterday at a closed session of Fulbright's committee. Rogers declined to discuss Vietnam or Latin America because of President Nixon's imminent speeches on them, but he ranged widely over other topics.

Rogers told reporters he did not think there would be any change of policy in Laos as a result of recent publicity for the large American commitment in weapons, transportation and advisers to defend Laos against Communist attacks.

The secretary took the innocent line that the commitment had begun in the Kennedy administration—Laotians have dated it to 1964, in the Johnson administration

—and he had thought Congress was familiar with it already.

Rogers also said a Senate resolution recommending an administration effort to arrange a mutual Soviet-American halt of multiple warhead testing was unnecessary now, since the two powers were about to begin talks on such armaments limitation matters.

Grim Exceptions

Fulbright took polite, if a trifle grim, exception to both of these points when he talked with reporters later.

"I rather think," he said, that the publicity on an American "secret army" of Laotian guerrillas under Central Intelligence Agency sponsorship would influence administration policy.

Told Rogers had indicated otherwise, Fulbright said softly that he regretted it. He called it extraordinary for the United States to "be conducting quite a large war without any treaty or constitutional authorization." There is no precedent for it, he added.

Fulbright disputed the assumption that Congress had known what was going on. "I've never heard my colleagues refer to it . . . we certainly didn't know how extensive this was."

Committee to Move

Despite Rogers' opposition to the resolution on the warheads, called MIRVs, Fulbright said, his committee would consider it. He personally favored going ahead with it, even though it is late in the testing program for the new system for a halt, he said.

"I have the feeling," Fulbright said, "that this administration rather ~~dislikes~~ the idea of the Senate giving advice to the administra-

tion. . . I don't see anything wrong with the resolution."

Fulbright said his committee had also questioned Rogers at length on the Middle East and "had a long hassle" over the question of whether the upcoming arms talks were tied to political relations with Moscow.

Rogers had made clear at a news conference Saturday that they were not. But after a White House briefing Tuesday, two Republican leaders had made vague comments suggesting they were.

Political Clients Key

Rogers reiterated to the committee that the arms talks stood separately, Fulbright said, but noted that their progress obviously depended upon the over-all political climate between Washington and Moscow.

Sen. Stuart Symington, D-Mo., emerged from the hearing and confirmed that his own subcommittee's hearing on the U.S. commitment in Laos had ended Tuesday. He said the press had pretty well told what the committee had learned in secret.

Sen. John Sherman Cooper, R-Ky., said he plans to go ahead with his previously announced plan to try to amend future appropriations bills to prohibit U.S. troops from supporting Laotian or Thai forces.

But Fulbright told reporters money for the present Laotian involvement was hidden in the budget as part of secret appropriations for the CIA.